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AMAR CHITRA KATHA

KARNA

BRAVE, GENEROUS, ILL-FATED PRINCE

Vol 531 | ₹ 50

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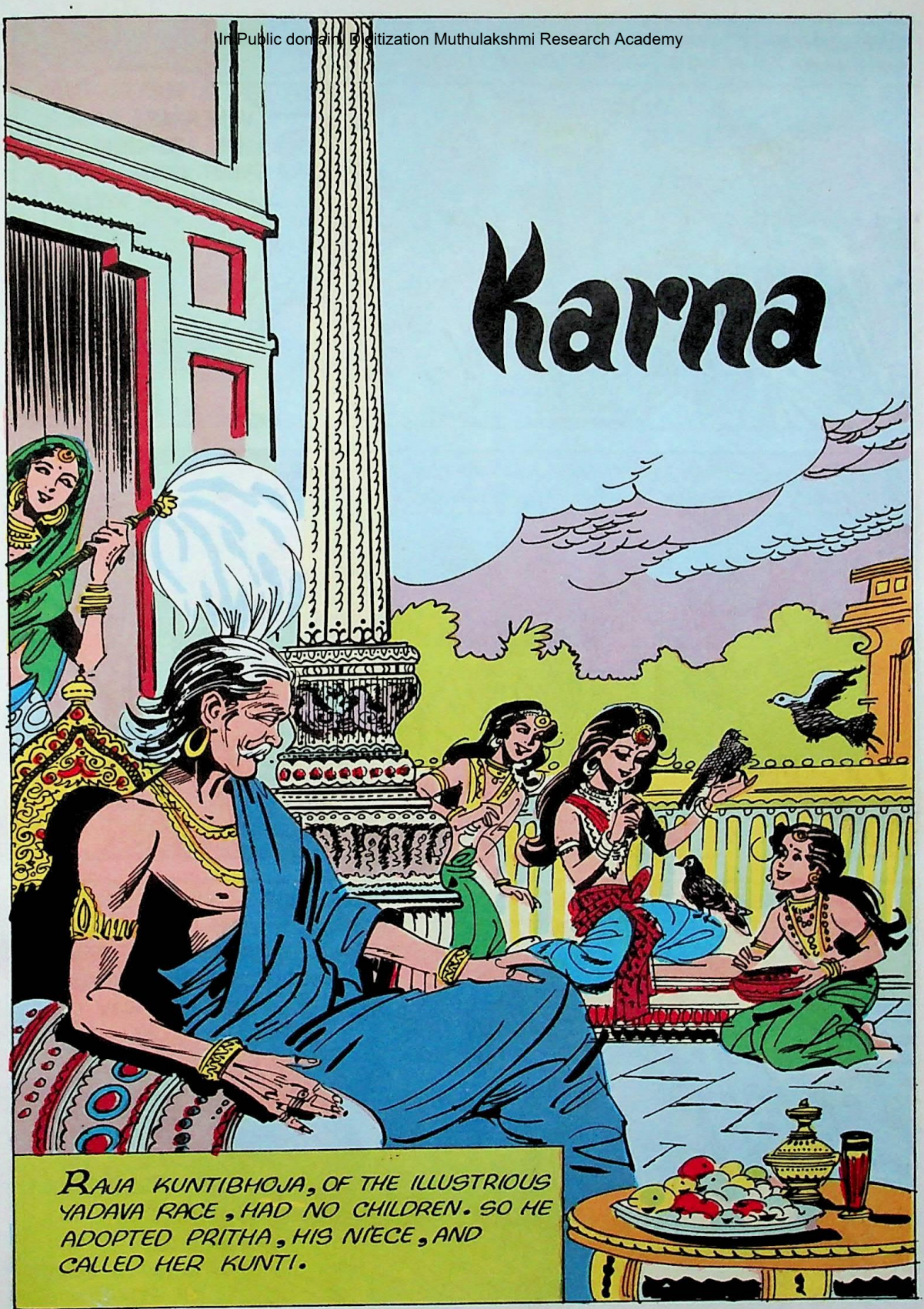
Karna



RAJA KUNTIBHOJA, OF THE ILLUSTRIOUS YADAVA RACE, HAD NO CHILDREN. SO HE ADOPTED PRITHA, HIS NIECE, AND CALLED HER KUNTI.

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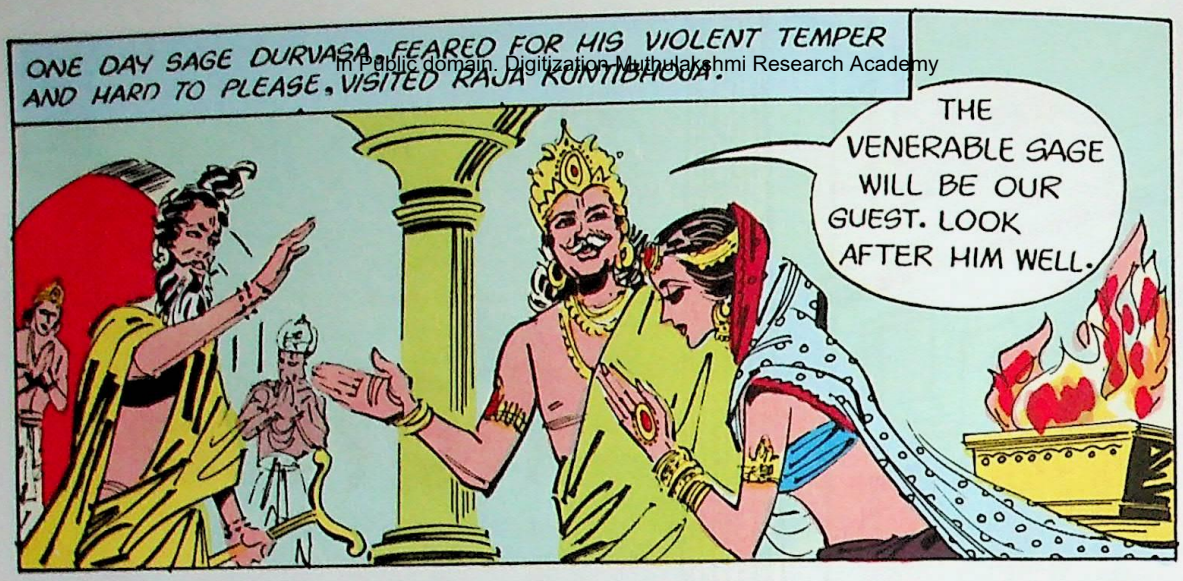

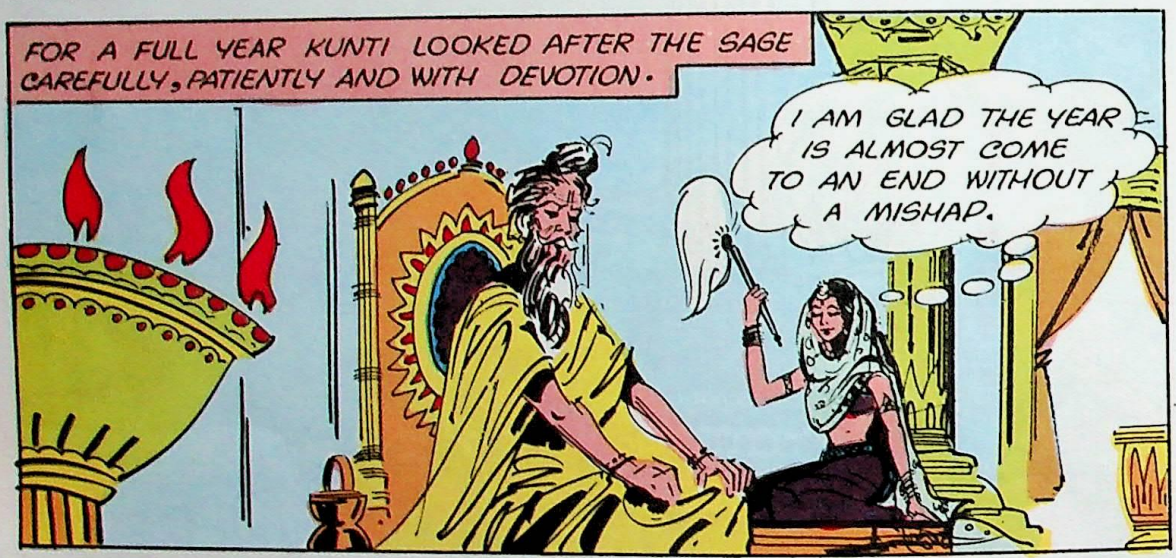

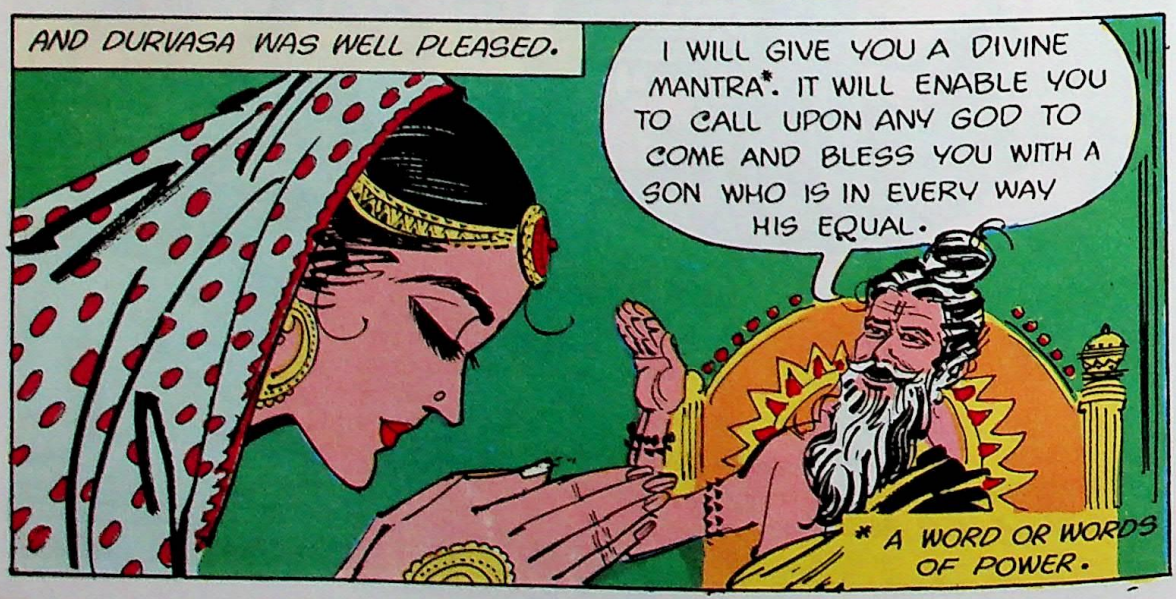

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AS SOON AS DURVASA LEFT.

I WONDER IF IT REALLY WORKS. OH! LORD SURYA SMILES AT ME. I WILL CALL HIM DOWN.

THE MANTRA OF COURSE WORKED.

YOU SHALL HAVE THE SON YOU DESIRE.

BUT I AM NOT MARRIED. I WAS ONLY CURIOUS TO SEE IF YOU WOULD COME. PLEASE, PLEASE GO BACK.

BUT SURYA COULD NOT GO, AS THE SPELL OF THE MANTRA HELD HIM. AND **KARNA** WAS BORN, WITH THE ①KAVACHA AND THE ②KUNDALAS — A GIFT FROM HIS DIVINE FATHER ③SURYA.

① ARMOUR
② EAR-RINGS
③ THE SUN-GOD

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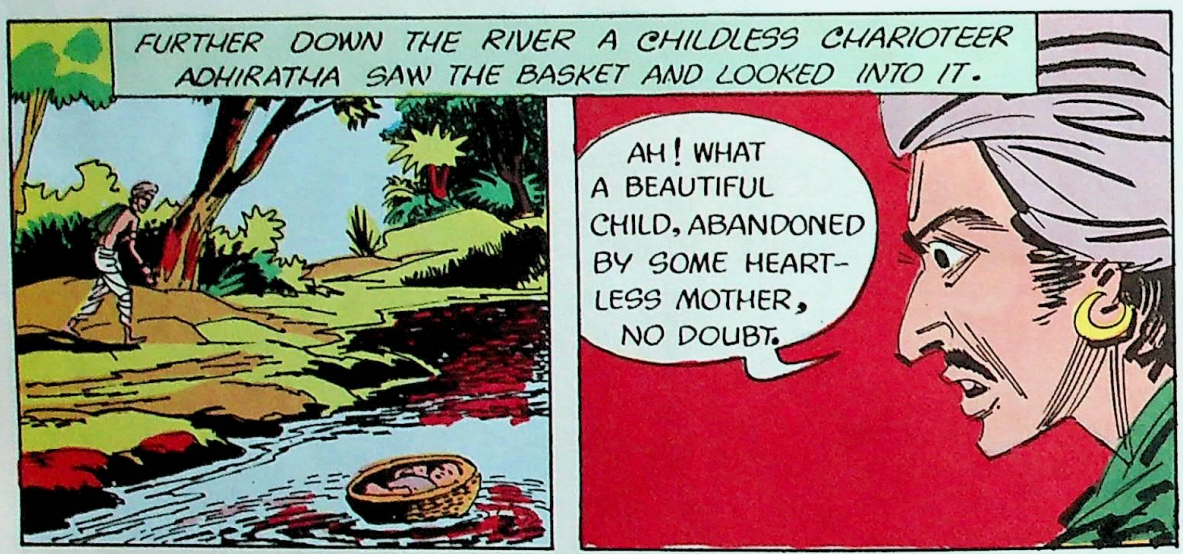

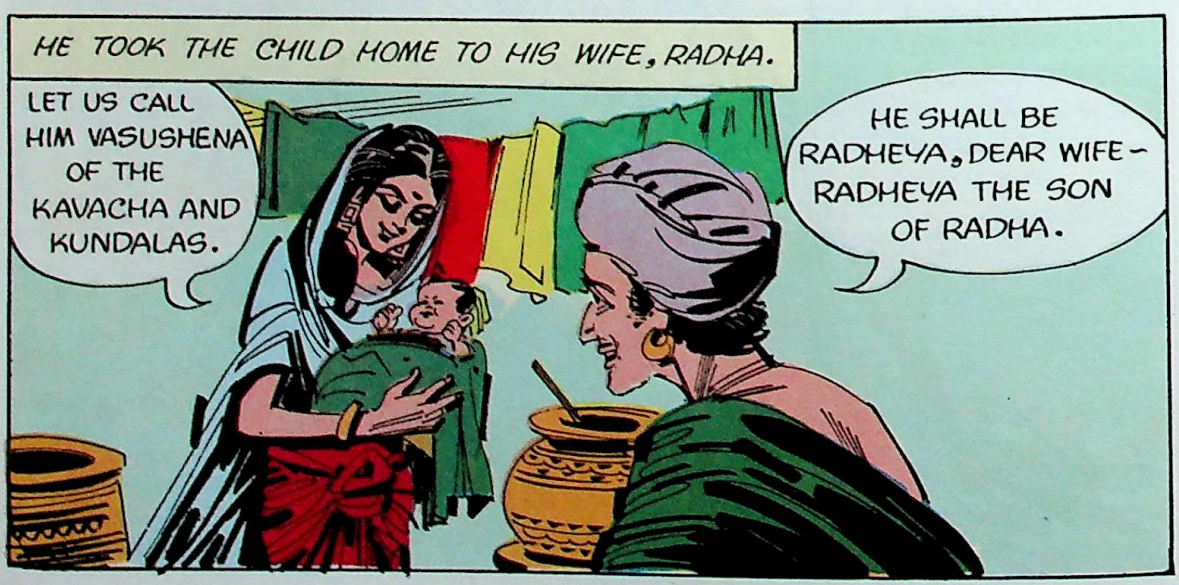

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KARNA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD WAS A HAPPY ONE.

KUNTI MEANWHILE HAD MARRIED KING PANDU OF HASTINAPURA, WHO RULED THE KINGDOM FOR HIS BLIND BROTHER DHRITARASHTRA.

BUT KING PANDU BECAUSE OF A CURSE COULD NOT HAVE CHILDREN. SO HE RETIRED WITH HIS TWO QUEENS, KUNTI AND MADRI, TO A QUIET LIFE IN THE HIMALAYAS.

BUT ONE DAY –

DEAREST ONE, HOW I SORROW WHEN I SEE YOUR CHILDLESS STATE!

DO NOT GRIEVE, MY LORD. I KNOW OF A WAY OUT BUT I HAVE NOT TOLD YOU ABOUT IT.

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WITH THE HELP OF THE MANTRA, KUNTI AND MADRI HAD FIVE SONS IN ALL – THE PANDAVA PRINCES.

WHEN PANDU DIED, MADRI BURNT HERSELF ON THE FUNERAL PYRE. KUNTI TOOK THE FIVE PRINCES, YUDHISHTHIRA (SON OF DHARMA), BHEEMA (SON OF VAYU), ARJUNA (SON OF INDRA), NAKULA AND SAHADEVA (SONS OF THE ASVINI TWINS), TO HASTINAPURA.

REVERED UNCLE BHEESHMA, AND WISE VIDURA, I LEAVE THE FATHERLESS SONS OF PANDU IN YOUR CARE.

THE PANDAVA PRINCES SHALL BE BROUGHT UP, AS THE HEIRS OF PANDU, ALONG WITH THEIR COUSINS THE KAURAVAS.

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FROM THE BEGINNING A BITTER RIVALRY SPRANG UP BETWEEN THE COUSINS. THE KAURAVA PRINCES WERE UNHAPPY.

OUR COUSINS HAVE COME AND SPOILT OUR LIFE.

BHEEMA TORMENTS ME ON THE PLAYGROUND AND HAUNTS MY DREAMS.

AND KARNA WHO OFTEN CAME TO HASTINAPURA WATCHED.

BHEEMA IS UNFAIR! POOR DURYODHANA.

DRONACHARYA, MASTER IN THE PRINCELY ARTS, TAUGHT THE PRINCES.

ARJUNA'S SKILL IN ARCHERY IS UNMATCHED BY ANY OF US. I FEAR THOSE PRINCES WILL RULE US ONE DAY.

KARNA TOO BECAME HIS PUPIL. BUT—

HE IS PARTIAL TO ARJUNA. HE WILL NEVER LET ME SURPASS HIM.

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GURU, PLEASE TEACH ME THE BRAHMASTRA.

THE BRAHMASTRA IS ONLY MEANT FOR BRAHMANAS, AND HIGH-BORN KSHATRIYAS. I CANNOT TEACH IT TO YOU— A CHARIOTEER'S SON.

KARNA WAS STUNG BY THESE WORDS.

PARASHURAMA, THEY SAY, HATES KSHATRIYAS. I WILL GO TO HIM IN THE GUISE OF A BRAHMAN. HE IS SURE TO ACCEPT ME AS HIS PUPIL.

WHEN HE REACHED THE ASHRAM OF THE GREAT SAGE —

I AM A BRAHMAN LAD. PLEASE ACCEPT ME AS YOUR PUPIL.

COME, MY SON. I AM WILLING TO TEACH ANY WORTHY YOUTH, WHO IS NOT A KSHATRIYA.

KARNA COULD NOT HELP THIS DECEPTION.

PARASHURAMA WAS VERY FOND OF HIS BRIGHT PUPIL.

YOU ARE NOW READY FOR THE MASTER WEAPON —THE BRAHMASTRA.

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THEN ONE DAY WHILE PARASHURAMA WAS RESTING WITH HIS HEAD ON KARNA'S LAP –

AH! HOW THE LITTLE INSECT STINGS. BUT I WILL NOT DISTURB YOUR REST, BELOVED MASTER. SLEEP ON.

AND THE WOUND BLED BUT KARNA DID NOT STIR.

WHEN THE SAGE WOKE UP AND SAW THE BLOOD –

YOU HAVE DECEIVED ME. ONLY A KSHATRIYA CAN BEAR SUCH PAIN TO PROTECT ANOTHER. TELL ME THE TRUTH!

KARNA CONFESSED.

I AM THE SON OF ADHIRATHA, THE CHARIOTEER, A SUTAPUTRA. FORGIVE ME, SIR.

THE ENRAGED SAGE CURSED KARNA.

FOR DECEIVING YOUR GURU, YOUR KNOWLEDGE WILL FAIL YOU WHEN YOU NEED IT MOST!

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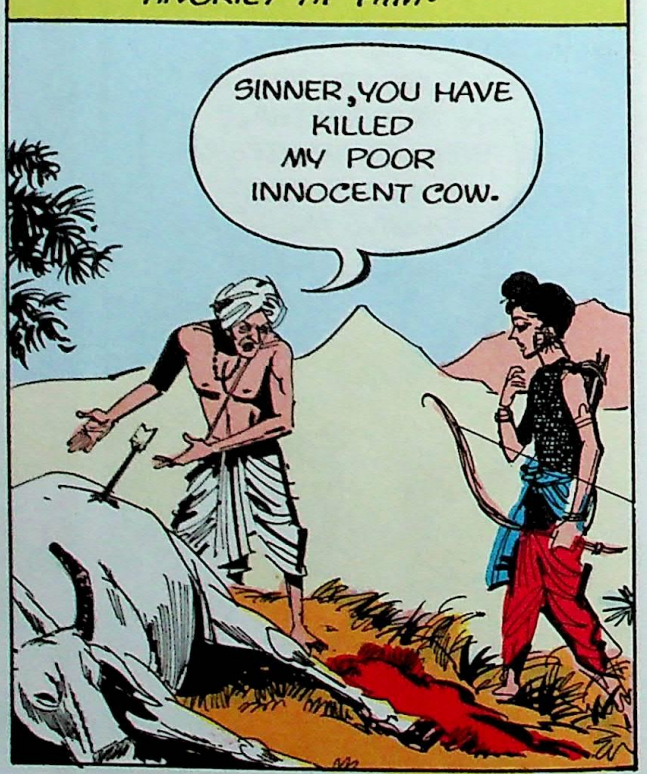
AS HE WALKED AWAY, THE TOTALLY DEJECTED KARNA HARDLY KNEW WHERE HE WAS GOING.

SUDDENLY AN ANIMAL RUSHED PAST AND WITHOUT THINKING HE DREW HIS BOW AND KILLED IT.

AS HE WALKED TOWARDS THE DEAD ANIMAL –

A BRAHMAN WAVED ANGRILY AT HIM.



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IGNORING KARNA'S ATTEMPTS TO EXPLAIN, THE BRAHMAN CURSED HIM.

YOU TOO WILL BE KILLED WHEN YOU ARE HELPLESS TO DEFEND YOURSELF. EVEN AS YOU KILLED MY HELPLESS COW.

KARNA SADLY RETURNED TO THE ONE PERSON WHO KNEW AND LOVED HIM – HIS MOTHER.

IT SEEMS AS IF FATE IS AGAINST ME. I WONDER WHAT FURTHER HUMILIATIONS SHE HAS IN STORE FOR ME.

HE STAYED WITH HER A FEW DAYS. THEN ONE DAY –

MOTHER, I HEAR THAT AN OPEN TOURNAMENT IS TO BE HELD AT HASTINA-PURA. I WILL COMPETE. A VALIANT WARRIOR WILL FIND HIS PLACE AMONG THE VALIANT.

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WHAT KARNA HAD HEARD WAS TRUE.

YOU ARE READY FOR AN EXHIBITION AND AN OPEN CONTEST OF YOUR SKILLS.

AFTER A CONSULTATION WITH THE KURU ELDERS, THE DAY WAS FIXED.

WITH HIS SPLENDID FEATS ARJUNA WAS EASILY THE CHAMPION OF THE DAY.

SUDDENLY THERE WAS A COMMOTION AND ALL EYES WERE TURNED TOWARDS THE ENTRANCE. A HUGE CHARIOT ENTERED ON THE SCENE. IT WAS KARNA.

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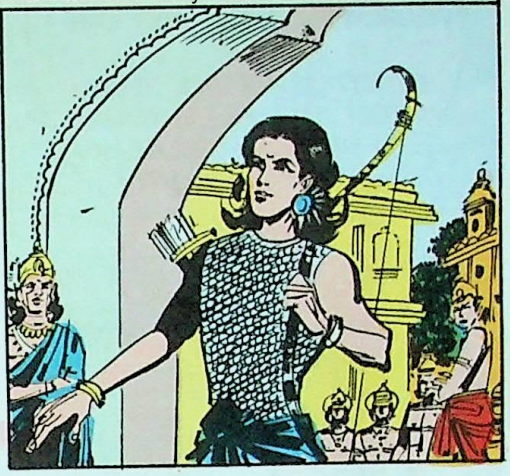
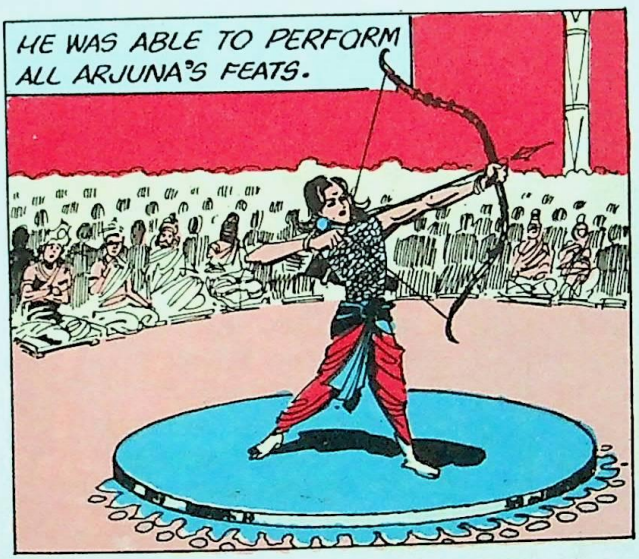
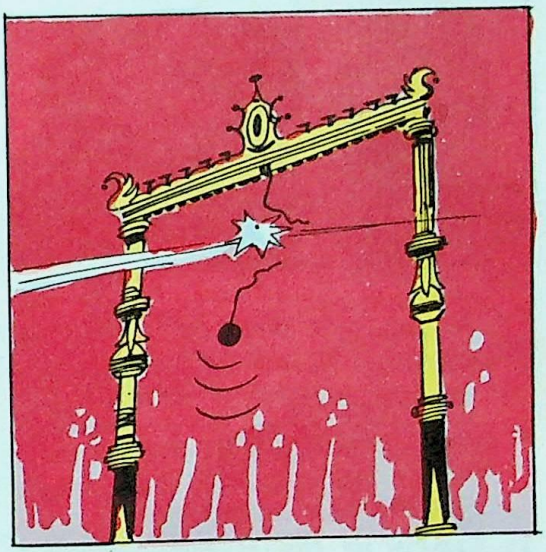


HE WAS ABLE TO PERFORM ALL ARJUNA'S FEATS.





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DURYODHANA WAS HAPPY AT...

WELCOME, O VALIANT ONE! IT IS OUR GOOD FORTUNE THAT YOU ARE HERE TODAY. WHAT SHALL BE YOUR REWARD?

KARNA WAS OVERWHELMED BY THIS WELCOME FROM DURYODHANA.

GOOD KING ALL I ASK IS YOUR LOVE AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET DRONA'S FAVOURITE PUPIL ARJUNA IN SINGLE COMBAT!

IT SHALL BE DONE!

AS ARJUNA WAS GETTING READY, KRIPA, A TEACHER IN THE KURU PALACE, STEPPED FORWARD.

WHO ARE YOU? REVEAL YOUR PARENTAGE. OUR PRINCE MAY FIGHT ONLY WITH HIS EQUAL IN BIRTH AND STATUS.

MY GLORY WAS SHORT-LIVED. HOW SHALL I ANSWER HIM? O HEARTLESS MOTHER WHO ABANDONED ME AT BIRTH, WHO AM I?

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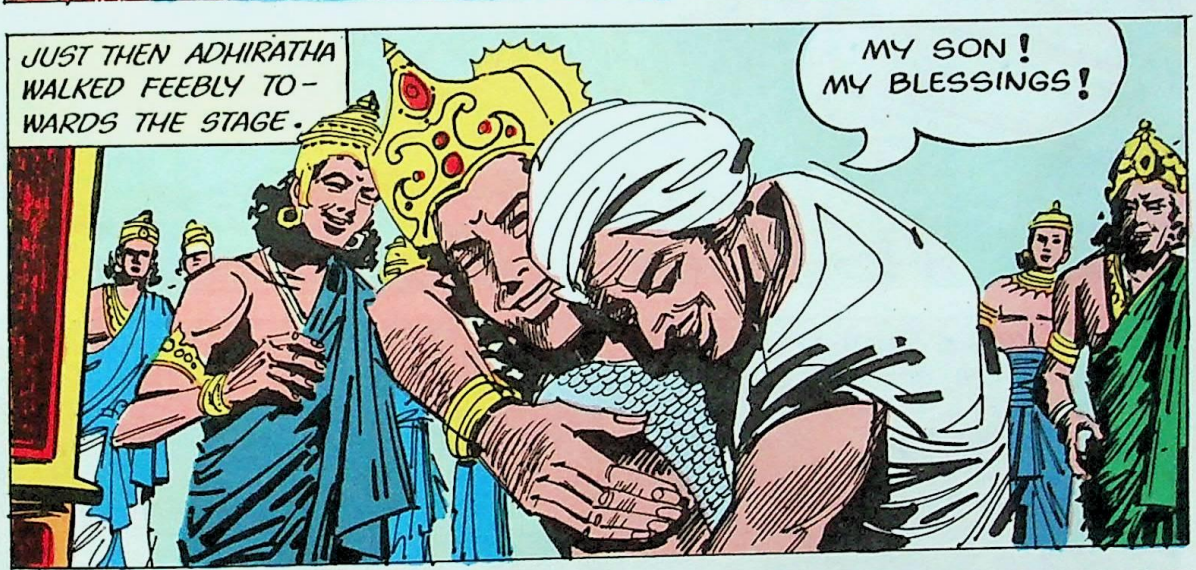

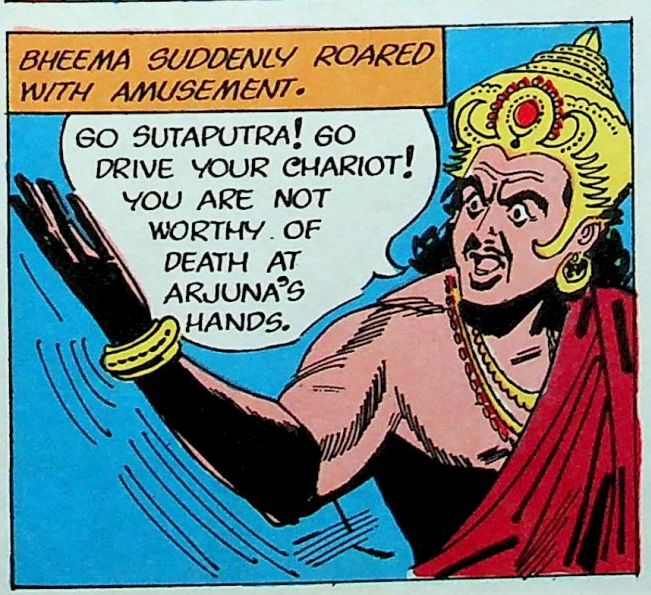

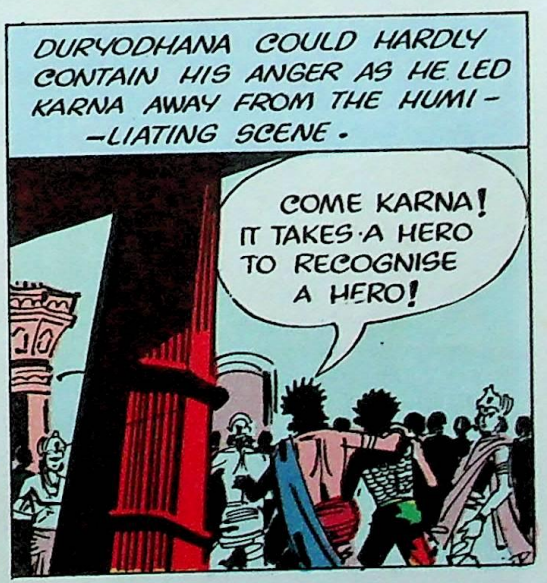

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AS THEY DROVE AWAY IN DURYODHANA'S CHARIOT...

IT IS STRANGE! I FEEL SAFE FROM THE PANDAVAS, ALREADY. WHAT POWER DOES THIS KARNA HAVE THAT MAKES ME FEEL SO?

DURYODHANA YOU HAVE NOT BEFRIENDED ME IN VAIN. I WILL KILL ARJUNA IN SINGLE COMBAT ONE DAY! I WILL!

AS THE YEARS PASSED, RELATIONS BETWEEN THE COUSINS ONLY WORSENED. KARNA, IMPELLED BY HIS LOVE FOR DURYODHANA, BLINDLY TOOK HIS SIDE. YUDHISHTHIRA WAS CHEATED AT A GAME OF DICE, DEPRIVED OF HIS KINGDOM AND BANISHED FOR THIRTEEN YEARS, WITH HIS BROTHERS AND QUEEN DRAUPADI. AT THE END OF THE PERIOD THE PANDAVAS OPTED FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT. BUT DURYODHANA, ENCOURAGED BY KARNA, AND AGAINST THE WISHES OF HIS ELDERS, REFUSED TO NEGOTIATE. IF THE PANDAVAS WANTED THEIR KINGDOM THEY WOULD HAVE TO FIGHT FOR IT.

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IN THE HEAVENS INDRA WAS CONCERNED ABOUT ARJUNA...

IF KARNA IS DEPRIVED OF HIS KAVACHA AND KUNDALAS, MY SON ARJUNA NEED FEAR NO MORTAL!

...AND SURYA ABOUT KARNA.

IF INDRA INTERVENES, MY SON HAS NO CHANCE. I MUST WARN KARNA.

SURYA TRIED TO WARN HIS SON IN A DREAM.

LORD INDRA WILL TRY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF YOUR GENEROSITY. DO NOT PART WITH YOUR KAVACHA AND KUNDALAS

INDRA APPROACHED KARNA IN THE GUISE OF A BRAHMAN.

I BEG FOR ALMS. KARNA, IT IS SAID, REFUSES NOTHING TO THOSE WHO ASK. I WANT YOUR KAVACHA AND KUNDALAS.

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DESPITE SURYA'S WARNINGS, KARNA, THE GENEROUS, PARTED WITH THE KAVACHA AND KUNDALAS.

MY LORD, I KNOW WHO YOU ARE AND WHY YOU ARE HERE. YET, I GIVE TO YOU MY VERY LIFE. NEVER LET IT BE SAID THAT KARNA REFUSED ANYONE ANYTHING.

INDRA WAS TOUCHED.

IN RETURN I GRANT YOU MY MASTER WEAPON SHAKTI, BUT YOU MAY USE IT ONLY ONCE.

THE PANDAVAS MEANWHILE STILL HOPED FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT.

KRISHNA, IF WE CAN AVOID WAR, I'D BE HAPPY.

I WILL TRY TO CONVINCE THE KAURAVAS TO GIVE YOU YOUR SHARE.

KRISHNA WENT TO HASTINAPURA. BUT –

I HAVE FAILED! DURYODHANA IS BENT UPON WAR. HE DEPENDS ON KARNA TO WIN IT FOR HIM. IT IS TIME KARNA KNEW THE TRUTH ABOUT HIS BIRTH.

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KRISHNA WENT TO KARNA AND TOLD HIM THE STORY OF HIS BIRTH. WHEN HE FINISHED —

COME WITH ME. I WILL MAKE YOU A GREAT EMPEROR. YOU WILL HAVE FIVE POWERFUL BROTHERS AND A MOTHER WHO LONGS FOR YOU.

KARNA WAS IN A TERRIBLE PREDICAMENT.

DURYODHANA'S LOVE IS WHAT I VALUE MOST IN MY LIFE. SO IF YOU REALLY HAVE MY INTEREST AT HEART PROMISE ME THAT YOU WILL KEEP THE SECRET OF MY BIRTH TILL I DIE.

I WILL!

WHEN KUNTI HEARD THAT KRISHNA'S TALKS HAD FAILED, SHE WAS FULL OF GRIEF.

I MUST NOW TELL KARNA WHO HE IS. THE WAR MAY YET BE AVERTED.

SHE WENT TO KARNA WHEN HE WAS AT THE END OF HIS MIDDAY PRAYERS.

MY MOTHER! HERE! WHAT CAN SHE WANT?

WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU, O QUEEN?

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SHE TOO RELATED TO KARNA THE STORY OF HIS BIRTH AND PLEADED WITH HIM NOT TO FIGHT HIS BROTHERS.

SEE, EVEN LORD SURYA, YOUR FATHER, JOINS ME IN MY REQUEST.

MOTHER, WHAT YOU ASK ME TO DO IS AGAINST MY DHARMA.

BUT HE WOULD NOT LET HIS MOTHER'S PLEAS GO IN VAIN.

I WILL FIGHT AGAINST YOUR SONS, MY BROTHERS, BUT I WILL NOT KILL ANY EXCEPT ARJUNA. YOU SHALL STILL HAVE FIVE SONS ALIVE AND I MY HONOUR.

KUNTI BLESSED KARNA AND LEFT HIM WITH MIXED FEELINGS.

BHEESHMA WAS TO LEAD THE KAURAVA ARMY. WHEN KARNA HEARD THAT, HE WENT TO DURYODHANA.

BHEESHMA HAS NEVER LIKED ME, AND I WILL NOT TAKE ORDERS FROM HIM. I WILL ENTER THE FIELD ONLY WHEN HE HAS FALLEN.

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AND SO THE BATTLE OF KURUKSHETRA BECAME A REALITY. IT LASTED FOR 18 LONG DAYS. MANY VALIANT MEN WERE LOST ON EITHER SIDE. THE VENERABLE COMMANDER BHEESHMA, OF THE KAURAVA ARMIES, FELL ON THE TENTH DAY. HE FELL ON A BED OF ARROWS - STICKING OUT FROM HIS OWN ARMOUR. KARNA HAD ALWAYS LONGED FOR THE GRANDSIRE'S LOVE. WHEN HE HEARD THAT HE LAY WOUNDED, KARNA RUSHED TO THE SPOT.

MY LORD! I HAVE NEVER BEEN FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO BE LIKED BY YOU. YET I HAVE COME TO PAY MY RESPECTS TO YOU AND TO ASK FOR YOUR BLESSINGS.

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AND SO THE BATTLE RAGED ON. IT WAS THE FOURTEENTH DAY. KARNA WAS ENGAGED IN FIGHTING BHEEMA. KARNA COULD EASILY HAVE KILLED HIM, BUT –

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THAT DAY THE BATTLE CONTINUED INTO THE NIGHT. THIS WAS LUCKY FOR BHEEMA'S SON GHATOTKACHA AND HIS RAKSHASA FORCES, FOR RAKSHASAS ARE STRONGEST AT NIGHT.

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THE ILL-FATED KARNA, IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE, FORGOT HIMSELF AND USED THE INFALLIBLE SHAKTI - THE WEAPON OF INDRA.

ONCE MORE THE GODS HAD SMILED ON THE FAVOURED ARJUNA.

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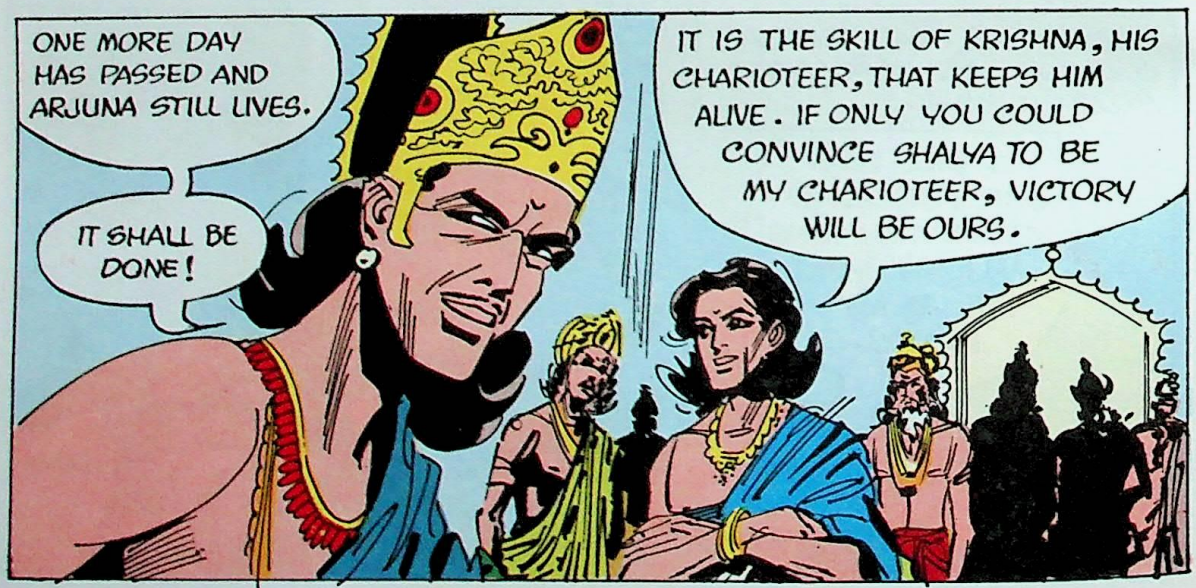

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KARNA LEFT DURYODHANA AND WENT TO HIS TENT. THERE, AS HE LAY AWAKE-

TOMORROW I FIGHT ARJUNA AND I MUST HONESTLY TRY TO KILL HIM. BUT I KNOW MY CHANCES ARE POOR.

HE TOSSED ABOUT RESTLESSLY. IT WAS A DIFFICULT NIGHT FOR HIM.

TOMORROW I WILL TRY TO FIGHT AND SPARE YUDHISHTHIRA TOO. MOTHER KUNTI MUST KNOW HOW I KEPT MY PROMISE.

HOW I LONGED FOR HER LOVE AND RECOGNITION! AND IN THESE MOMENTS, HOW I TREASURE THE BOUNDLESS LOVE OF MOTHER RADHA AND MY NOBLE DURYODHANA.

THIS LAST THOUGHT FINALLY LULLED HIM TO SLEEP.

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THE NEXT DAY KARNA HAD HIS WISH TO ENGAGE YUDHISHTHIRA IN SINGLE COMBAT.

ARJUNA SHALL AVENGE ME.

I SPARE YOUR LIFE, YUDHISHTHIRA. YOU CAN NEVER KILL ME IN SINGLE COMBAT. LEAVE YOUR SUPERIORS TO THEIR EQUALS.

WHEN ARJUNA HEARD OF YUDHISHTHIRA'S HUMILIATION, HE COULD NOT WAIT TO ATTACK KARNA. HE SOON HAD THE CHANCE.

HOW WELL MY BROTHER WIELDS HIS WEAPONS!

HE FIGHTS LIKE A KING. IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE THAT HE IS ONLY A CHARIOTEER'S SON!

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ALAS! FOR KARNA THE END WAS DRAWING NEAR. A WHEEL OF HIS CHARIOT SANK INTO THE GROUND.

MY MEMORY FAILS ME. I CANNOT RECALL THE MANTRAS OF THE GREAT PARASHURAMA!

WHILE HE JUMPED DOWN AND TRIED TO DRAG IT OUT, ARJUNA WAS AT AN ADVANTAGE. PARASHURAMA'S CURSE HAD TAKEN EFFECT.

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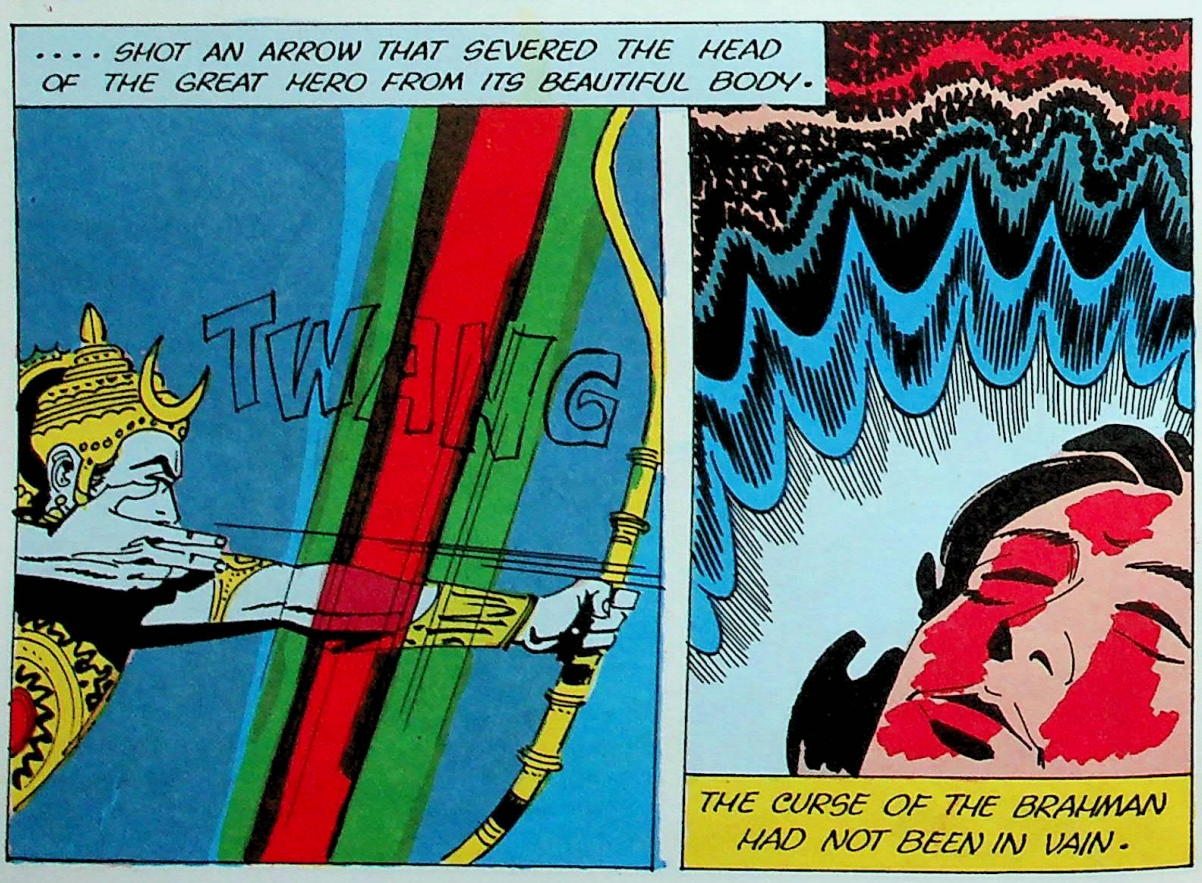
WHEN KARAM WAS THUS HELPLESS, ARJUNA, WITH KRISHNA'S PROMPTING ....

.... SHOT AN ARROW THAT SEVERED THE HEAD OF THE GREAT HERO FROM ITS BEAUTIFUL BODY.

TWANG

THE CURSE OF THE BRAHMAN HAD NOT BEEN IN VAIN.



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WHEN KUNTI HEARD OF KARNA'S DEATH —

DEAR, DEAR, SON! I CAST YOU OFF AT BIRTH AND YOUR DEATH I CAN BUT LAMENT IN PRIVATE.

AFTER THE BATTLE, THE VICTORIOUS PANDAVAS PERFORMED THE DEATH CEREMONIES FOR THE DEAD.

WILL I HAVE THE COURAGE TO SEND YOUR SOUL ON ITS JOURNEY AS BEFITS YOUR BIRTH?

JUST AS YUDHISHTHIRA HAD ENDED WITH THE LAST OFFERING TO THEIR KINSMEN —

WAIT! THERE IS ONE MORE LEFT.

WHO IS IT THAT I HAVE FORGOTTEN?

KARNA!

BUT WHY SHOULD I DO IT FOR KARNA? KARNA, OUR ARCH ENEMY, KARNA THE CHARIOTEER'S SON!

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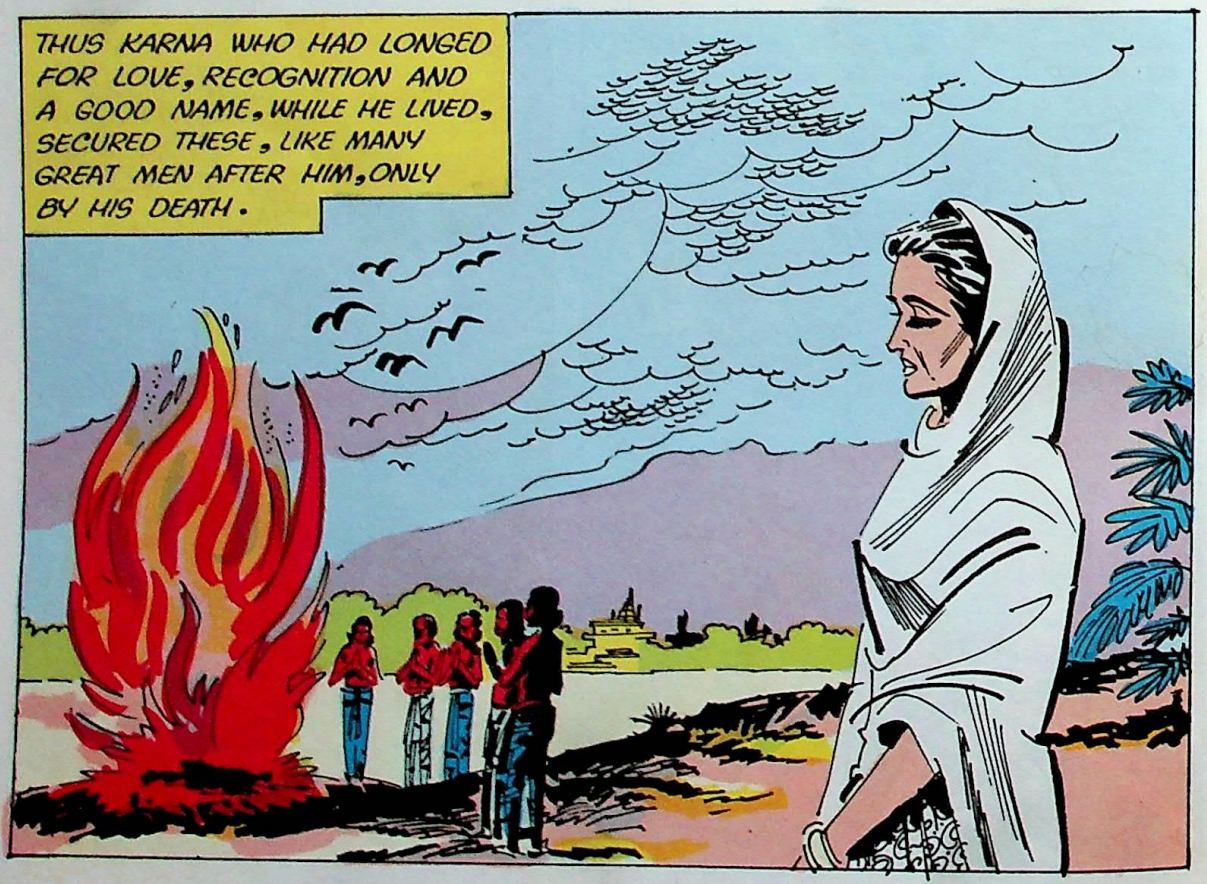

WHICH OF THE ACKS HAVE YOU STILL NOT READ?

ACK EPICS AND MYTHOLOGY

Best known stories from the Epics and the Puranas

ABHIMANYU
ANDHAKA
ANIRUDDHA
ARJUNA, TALES OF
ARUNI AND UTTANKA
ASHWINI KUMARS
AYYAPPAN
BAHUBALI
BALARAMA, TALES OF
BHEEMA AND HANUMAN
BHEESHMA
CHANDRAHASA
CHURNING OF THE OCEAN
DASHARATHA
DHRUVA AND ASHTAVAKRA
DRAUPADI
DRONA
DURGA, TALES OF
ELEPHANTA
GANDHARI
GANESHA
GANGA
GARUDA
GHATOTKACHA
GITA, THE
GOLDEN MONGOOSE, THE
HANUMAN
HANUMAN TO THE RESCUE
HARISCHANDRA
INDRA AND SHACHI
INDRA AND SHIBI
JAGANNATHA OF PURI
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KARNA

Karna is one of the most poignant characters of the Mahabharata -- generous to a fault but with shades of grey. Although born to princess Kunti and the sun god Surya, he grew up as the son of a humble charioteer. His talent and ambition, however, would not allow him to languish in anonymity. The Kaurava prince, Duryodhana, recognised his ability at archery and made him king of Anga. For this, Karna remained loyal to him till the end. He met an untimely end at the hands of his brother Arjuna in the Mahabharata War.

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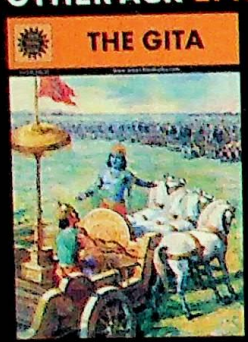

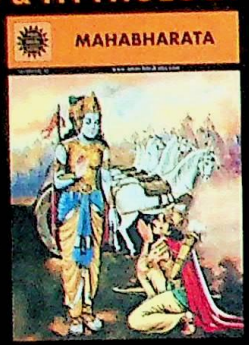

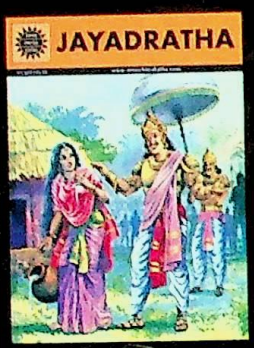

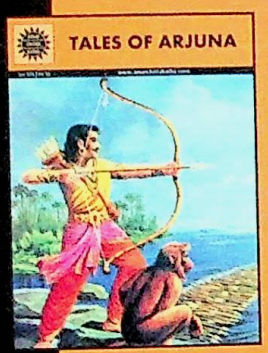

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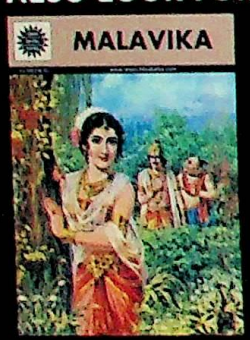

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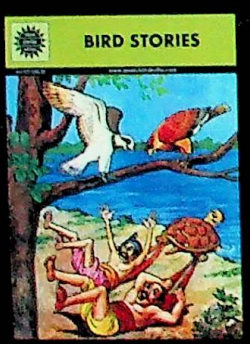

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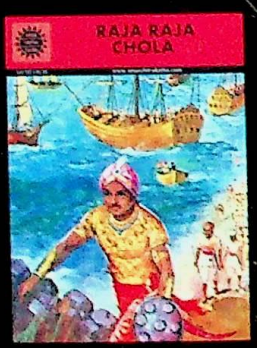

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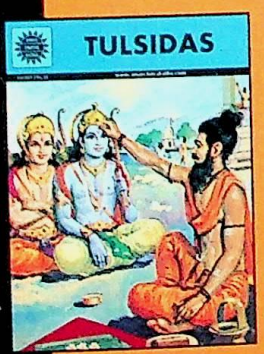

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"Amar Chitra Kathas are a glorious tribute to India's rich cultural heritage. These books have been an integral part of my children's early years, as they have been for many other families across India. Comics are a great way of reaching out to children, inculcating reading habits and driving their quest to learn more about our roots."

- NARAYAN MURTHY, CHIEF MENTOR, INFOSYS

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